

GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL CONGRESSIONAL MEETING

Schedule the meeting

- Call or write your legislator's office to schedule the meeting.
- If you know the specific issues, let the office know. If you are unsure of the issues, let them know you will discuss issues important to ill and injured veterans, their families and survivors.

Preparing for the Meeting

- Plan to discuss no more than two or three issues. Meetings usually last from 15- to 25-minutes, depending on the member's schedule.
- Learn everything you can about your issue(s).
- Learn everything you can about any opposition to your issue(s) and be ready to defend your position. (On veterans issues, the opposition usually stems from costs to pay for the program or benefit.)
- Bring talking points of DAV's legislative priorities, which will be available in early February.
- If you are attending the meeting as a group, pick a spokesperson to lead the discussion.

At the Meeting

- Arrive about 10 minutes before the appointment time. At least, be on time. Dress neatly and conservatively. Be courteous and respectful. Don't be nervous.
- Do not be upset if you end up meeting with the legislator's staff. They are often more knowledgeable of individual issues than the legislators themselves, and they will inform the legislator of your views and requests.
- Introduce yourself and all members of your group to the legislator or staff members: tell them who you are and where you live. After a minute or two of "small talk," state your position on the issue(s) you came to discuss.
- Be concise and factual, brief, respectful, and be sure to listen carefully.
- Be ready to answer questions and discuss your issue in detail. If you cannot answer the question, let them know that someone from the DAV National Legislative Department will be in touch with them. Make sure you inform the DAV legislative staff of the question and the person to contact in the legislator's office.
- If the legislator disagrees with you, you can *respectfully* debate the issues, if you feel comfortable, but do not become over-argumentative. Emphasize the positives of your standpoint, and always end the conversation on a positive note.
- Remain nonpartisan throughout the meeting.

After the Meeting

- Always send a follow-up letter or email thanking your legislator or staff members. Also include any additional information you may have offered to provide in support of your issue. The follow-up message is important, because it confirms your commitment to your cause and helps build a valuable relationship between you and your representative.
- Stay in touch with congressional staff throughout the year.